

1. Intros:
  - a. Who we are
  - b. We are not licensed family counselors
    - i. But we do have experience as a married couple
2. Sources:
  - a. “Couple Skills: Making Your Relationship Work” by Mathew McKay
  - b. “You’re Not Listening” by Kate Murphy – NYT contributor

### Couple Skills:

1. Listening is hard work – it is much easier to drift away into our own thoughts, to filter the content for danger signs, to collect evidence for our own opinions – or worse, to pass judgement
2. Listening is a hard won skill for some of us – not all have the natural tendency to sit with someone and really pay attention to what another has to say
  - a. But no matter what your skill level, we all can learn something new about how listening will enrich our lives, especially with those we love

**Q: How can you tell when someone is not listening to you?**

**Q: Do you recognize when you are not listening?**

3. There is so much more to listening than hitting the pause button on your own internal conversations and priorities. McKay writes, “Real listening is distinguished by your intention. If your intention is to understand, enjoy, learn from, or help your partner, then you are really listening.”
4. Part of being a Christian is endeavoring to be self-reflective – trying to watch ourselves – catching ourselves when do the things that

move us toward Godly living and also (and sometimes painfully) seeing when we could have done something much better.

5. If real listening is distinguished by our intentions – what then would hinder us from being superstars?

- Mind reading – distrust what saying by looking for “real meaning” behind words
- Rehearing – too busy with own response that you don’t hear partner
- Filtering – listen to some things but not others; including & excluding information
- Judging – stopped listening due to negative judgement, or listen for assigning blame
- Daydreaming – attention wanders
- Advising – jump in with own advice, your partner isn’t really heard
- Sparring – listening to disagree, argue and debate; defending positions
- Being right – any suggestion of you being wrong you will fight off criticism
- Derailing – change the subject, derail, joke, if too threatening
- Placating – too quick to agree, concern with being nice, supportive, partner doesn’t really fully express thoughts

**Question for thought: What blocks do you use in different situations?**

**G: If you spend any time with me, you know I come from a long line of know it alls. It is genetic, it is punishing, and many times, if I cannot stop myself, it makes me look foolish. I love to be right.**

**The issue is that I married an amazingly intelligent and capable woman. Who I suspects lets me be right as an act of generosity.**

6. **Figure out what is keeping you from really listening and address it like adults – as children, this is what we have been waiting for – the power to change things, to make things better for us.**
7. **So how do we do that? The skill is called Active Listening**

#### Step One:

Stop whatever you are doing when your partner wants to talk – make an appointment if necessary, find a time of day convenient for both of you, grab a beverage and do a check in on your day that dove tails into the conversation you need to have.

#### Step Two:

Listening with your body – demonstrate you are listening:

1. Maintain eye contact
2. Move closer or lean slightly forward
3. Nod or interject a “yes” or an “uh huh”
4. Smile or frown in sympathy with what is being said
5. Keep your posture open, facing partner, arms unfolded and uncrossed
6. Actively move away from distractions. Turn music down, put away phone, etc.

#### Step Two and a half:

While you are doing step two, paraphrase every once in a while. When something important is said, state it back in your own words. “What I hear you saying is...” “If I understand you correctly....” “Do you mean...?”

#### Step Three: Feedback

In this strategy, now is the time for you to have your say. You have heard your partner and you have shown your partner that you care enough to be actively engaged in the conversation.

Feedback suggests that there is a common conversational ground; it demonstrates that your partners words have sunk in and that there is now an opportunity for any corrections to take place. Feedback also allows your partner to hear about the topic from your point of view. It should be immediate, honest, and supportive: no manipulations, no shading, nothing but your honest thoughts that lift up rather than degrade.

Any attempt to turn the tables, abuse facts, or to win will crash this interaction – there is already so much invested in it – keep everything above board. Your goal is for both of you to be heard.

However, if you think your partner is in the wrong – say it gently, just like that rather than, “well, you screwed that up again.”

Communication is the framework of how we get what we desire in any relationship – personal or work related. And if this seems too much like a calculated plan – know that to teach any skill, it must be broken down into manageable steps. It won't take long before you are gliding through these steps, barely noticing where one ends and the next begins.

Questions while we hand out the take home

Resources:

Gottman, J. M. & Silver, N. (1999). The seven principles for making marriage work.

McKay, M., Fanning, P., & Paleg, K., (2006). Couple skills: Making your relationship work (2nd edition).

Murphy, K., (2020). You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why It Matters

## Handout

Communication does not happen without real listening. These exercises are to prompt you to improve your skills at listening to your partner.

Reflect: What blocks you from real listening?

- Mind reading
- Rehearing
- Filtering
- Judging
- Daydreaming
- Advising
- Sparring
- Being right
- Derailing
- Placating

Reflection exercise: Describe two situations where communication broke down with you are your partner. Which blocks prevented you from listening?

Situation:

Blocks:

Situation:

Blocks:

Next: Over next few days, be aware of which blocks you use and in what type of situations. Reflect on how you listen with your body.

### Reciprocal communication exercise

Agree to discuss a topic that is a source of mild conflict between you. Take turns being the speaker and the listener.

When you are the speaker:

1. Explain your point of view briefly and succinctly
2. Talk in terms of yourself and your experience. Use “I” statements
3. Avoid blame and name-calling: no “you” statement about your partner’s failings

Stop after 5 minutes. Your partner will summarize what you just said. Let your partner know if anything is left out.

When you are the listener:

1. Pay close attention to really understand your partner’s feelings, opinion, and needs.
2. Don’t disagree, argue, correct, or talk back
3. You may ask questions for clarification only

After you partner speaks for five minutes summarize your partner’s experience as you heard it. Your partner will add anything you left out or clarify anything you may have misunderstood. Keep going back and forth until the speaker feels that he or she has been completely heard and understood

Now switch places, letting one who was the listening become the speaker and vice versa. These skills can be practiced over a lifetime together.

Adapted from: McKay, M., Fanning, P., & Paleg, K., (2006). Couple skills: Making your relationship work (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).